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Agricultural Adjustment Administration

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AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION

Address by E. A. Miller, Assistant to Director,  
Southern Division, Agricultural Adjustment Administration,  
at Bethel A. M. E. Church, Detroit, Michigan,  
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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Dr. Peck and Friends:

It is a very great personal privilege for me to meet with you in your hour of worship today. Your Pastor, Dr. Peck, has done me a very great honor in extending to me an invitation to speak to you on a subject that is necessarily economical, but which is essentially of great spiritual importance. It is vital to the soul's well-being that the body be fed. Benjamin Franklin was author of the expression "an empty bag cannot stand upright".

Please permit me to extend greetings to you from our Acting Director, Dr. I. W. Duggan.

I am glad to be with you in this city which the United States Census reports show to be one of the most progressive cities in the country from the standpoint of Negro business development. I am glad to be guest in the church whose pastor is the founder of the Booker T. Washington Trade Association, which has been such a factor in encouraging this economic progress among you.

I am glad to worship with you in this African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was the first organization in this country entirely administered by members of your race and which has done much to demonstrate your capacity for leadership and self-reliance. Richard Allen who founded this church organization back in the days of slavery, established himself as one of the great leaders of the Negro race, and on this occasion it gives me pleasure to pay this tribute to his memory.

Along with these felicitations I cannot omit a word of commendation to Mrs. Peck for her genius in organizing some ten thousand or more women of your race here in Detroit into the Housewives League. The purposes of this organization are vital to the progress of your people and its growth gives encouragement to you and to your many friends.

You have probably discovered from my accent that I am from the South. In addition to my appearance here as a representative of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, I wish to be considered a messenger of good will from that ever growing number of liberal minded people of the new South who are vitally interested in the economic and civic progress of both our races. Aside from the humanitarian aspects, we consider it fundamentally essential that both races advance together with equal opportunity.

It is my desire to discuss with you today our National Agricultural Conservation Program, with its application to the general public and its particular application to the members of your race in the Southern Region of the United States. It is necessary, therefore, that we should first consider

Agriculture as related to the stability of all business.

The economic structure of the United States rests primarily upon the prosperity of those engaged in farming. The farmer is a producer of new wealth. The commodities he produces each year never existed before. The movement of these commodities into the channels of trade and consumption bring a fresh supply of money into the hands of Agricultural producers. It might very properly be said that this is new money. It is at least new purchasing power.

Since the farmer is not only the primary producer, but also the primary purchaser, his prosperity affects the prosperity of everyone. The affect of his buying power on all Industry is determined by the degree of profit or lack of profit in his enterprises. If the new wealth, namely, cotton, wheat, pork, dairy and poultry products is produced at a loss it becomes a liability on the whole economic community. The lack of purchasing power resulting from such a situation retards consumption, slows down manufacturing, lightens the load of the agencies of transportation, reduces the need for labor employment, thereby turning the curve of prosperity in a downward direction.

On the other hand, if the farmer's new wealth is produced at a profit his purchasing power is increased and all Industry is correspondingly speeded up.

Let us illustrate the relationship of Agriculture to the entire economic structure. Let us suppose this structure to be represented by a table, supported by four legs. The legs of the table are respectively, Agriculture, Industry, Finance and Transportation. Each leg is essential to the stability of the table. If any leg becomes impaired or is dislocated, the table is likely to collapse. For a number of years preceding the depression, responsible economists tell us that the annual income of the farmer was far below that of other groups. Year after year the farmers' purchasing power decreased. In other words, this important leg of our economic table became so impaired that it could not perform its function. When the stress of the fall of 1929 suddenly came upon the table the structure collapsed. Not only Agriculture, but every phase of our business life, went down.

You remember the situation. Cotton was five or six cents per pound; wheat was thirty cents a bushel; oats were twelve cents a bushel; beef cattle and hogs were three or four cents per pound and all agricultural products in line with these prices. The farmer was not only not in a position to pay his debts, but he had no money with which to purchase new supplies. Manufacturing plants were closed down, labor was out of employment, transportation lines were idle, banks closed their doors; in fact, our general economic situation was most critical.

An analysis of our plight in 1932-1933 revealed that if prosperity was to be restored and maintained, farming had to be placed on a profitable basis. The Government set out to place the business of farming on a parity with other industries. It was found that there was a great surplus of our basic commodities, such as cotton, wheat, pork and the like. The first thing to be accomplished in the new program was to adjust agricultural production and supply

to demand. This in itself, however, was not sufficient to establish parity for Agriculture. Many of our commodities are sold on the markets of the world and, hence, at world prices. The farmer, however, due to our tariff structure must buy his supplies in a protected market. The inequities, thus resulting from the sale of his commodities and the purchase of his supplies, had to be offset by parity or benefit payments to Agriculture.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act, and later the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, were the legislative devices provided to effect these results. Improved conditions are everywhere evident. With the advance of cotton from six to twelve cents per pound, wheat from thirty cents to one dollar a bushel and other Agricultural commodities with similar advances, the buying power of the farmer was greatly increased, manufacturers speeded up operations to meet the new demands, labor was re-employed, railroads resumed normal operations and confidence in financial institutions was reestablished. Probably nowhere was the result of low purchasing power on the part of the farmer more acutely reflected than here in this great city, the Automobile Capital of the World. A prosperous Agriculture has stabilized and will continue to stabilize the general well-being of all our people.

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, which superceded the Agricultural Adjustment Act, has for its broad purposes the maintaining and building up of the soil of our Nation and the stabilizing of the prosperity of farmers. Not only the farmers and their descendants are interested in a fertile soil, but the present and future well-being of all the people of the Nation is vitally connected therewith. The expression "poor land means a poor man", having reference to the operator of the particular piece of land, may also be applied to the Nation. Great fertile stretches of the virgin land of this country have been eroded by wind and water and depleted of their available fertility. The program which I have the privilege to present to you today provides for the restoration and conservation of our soil through the years to come, and the perpetuation of a great rural civilization, the foundation of our National existence.

In the nine States of the Southern Division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration there are 654,000 colored farmers. These farmers are vitally concerned with the programs that are being carried out to restore and maintain soil fertility and agricultural prosperity. An earnest effort has been made and is being made to include colored farmers in every way in the program. From the beginning, in 1933, when it became necessary to plow up ten million acres of cotton, until this present moment, there have been no more loyal cooperators in the program than the colored farmers of the South.

During the recent annual convention of the National Negro Business League, which was held in Atlanta, Georgia, and which I had the pleasure of attending, there were many reports and references to people of your own race who by active participation in the Government's programs, are prospering as farmers in the South and establishing themselves as substantial citizens in their respective counties.

A report from South Carolina described a cooperative association of Negro farmers in one county which last spring shipped over \$19,000 worth of tomatoes to Eastern markets.

Miles Hackney, a Negro farmer from Union Point, Georgia, addressed the Convention on how the Agricultural Conservation Program has enabled him to farm at a profit.

Through the efforts of the three colored members of our staff, Mrs. Jennie B. Moton, Mr. James P. Davis and Mr. A. L. Holsey, we have reports of hundreds of Negro farmers who in a quiet, unobtrusive way, are acquiring valuable farm lands, saving their earnings from farming and demonstrating, through sustained, intelligent work, that farming can be made to pay. Among the Negro farmers of the nine States of the Southern Division there are 122,000 land owners.

In this connection, may I repeat that reports from our white representatives in the States show that Negro farmers are loyal supporters of the Government's program. I am glad to give this recognition and to pay this tribute to the Negro farmers of the South.

Time does not permit me to give a long list of names of your people who are prospering on the farms, but I will mention three or four, just as examples:

Richard Harrison, of Orrville, Alabama, received \$213.53 for his share in the plow-up campaign of 1933. With this money he paid the balance due on a forty-eight acre farm. With subsequent payments for cooperating in the Soil Conservation Campaigns, he has erected a seven-room house to replace the three room cabin, in which he and his family formerly lived.

John Leonard, who owns 200 acres of land near Tallahassee, Florida, and leases 400 acres additional, has been such a successful farmer that in 1936 he was selected by State Extension Officials to make an official demonstration in growing Sea Island Cotton in North Florida. The other two farmers selected for this demonstration were white. John Leonard not only succeeded with his experiment, but sold 1934 pounds of this Sea Island Cotton for \$579.42.

B. C. Cunningham of Woodruff, S. C., is 77 years old and has been farming in the same place for thirty-five years. He owns 187 acres of land, for some of which he has refused \$700 an acre. He boasts of the fact that since his first year as a farmer, he has not bought a pound of meat. He told one of our representatives that with the aid of the Government's programs, opportunities are better now for the farmer than they have been in twenty years.

Another type of successful Negro farmer is the one who manages large farms for some corporation or individual, and there are many of this type. If any of you are ever in Florida, visit the Live Oak Plantation, near Tallahassee, and see how John C. Snead manages this 3000 acre farm, for a wealthy white business man of Jacksonville, Florida. The owner entrusts every management detail of this farm to Mr. Snead and only visits the place about twice a year when he brings his friends there to hunt.

Men such as these mentioned, and I could refer to hundreds of them, are men I hope you and your children will know more about. They are doing more to encourage good feeling and cooperation between the races than all the speeches we may listen to on the subject.

As previously stated, the welfare of our people depends in a large measure upon the prosperity of Agriculture. Possibly no where is it more nearly true than here in Detroit, that there is a direct relationship between the people of this city and Agricultural prosperity. When the cotton farmer down home makes good crops and gets fair prices, it means a sale of more new automobiles. The manufacture of these automobiles means jobs for the people of this city. That, in turn, means increased business for all the people in Detroit. Both directly and indirectly you people here in this church this morning are affected by the prosperity of the cotton farmers.

Then, too, you are personally affected by the prosperity of the farmers in the Cotton States. Many of you came from down South. You have friends and loved ones there. Their well being means your happiness. You and I have experienced the thrill that comes with the knowledge "all is well" with the people back home.

